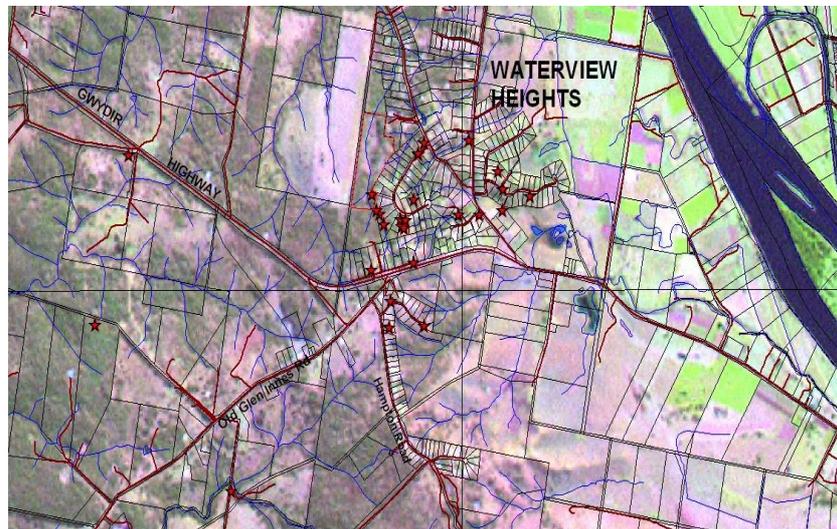


Koala report, March 2012

The issue hanging over us for a long time has been Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke's decision on whether or not to list koala as a nationally threatened species. Deb Tabart, CEO of the Australian Koala Foundation had a bet with herself that he would procrastinate yet again. And she was spot on. For the fifth time an environment minister - whose job it is to find a balance between our native wildlife needs and human growth - leaves himself still facing the complexities of changing the threats to koala habitat without upsetting our industries.

The discussion of forestry practices by the Senate Inquiry certainly put the spotlight on this industry's bad practices, while the Urban Development Industry Australia stated outright that any further commonwealth regulation would be unreasonable and unhelpful in meeting urban development needs

So now we wait a further 10 weeks while Mr Burke's Scientific Committee attempt to gather yet more information. Then, if he makes a decision at all, it will be whether to list koalas in Queensland and NSW, where they are in decline, and exclude SA where they look to be doing OK, or - he hopes - identify and list areas within State boundaries where they may need more help than others. Either way there could finally be national listings for separate parts of a species' range - which is an extraordinary precedent under a commonwealth Act



Clustered recorded koala sightings on the fringe at Waterview

Meanwhile we also wait to learn which category our Clarence koalas will fall into, now that they appear to be slowly recovering. Or is this recovery simply a perception, because they have reached the outskirts of the cleared suburbs, cane farms and river banks and are more noticeable to residents, with nowhere else to go? If these questions cannot be positively answered, then the precautionary principal should definitely apply.

Also meanwhile, as we continue to wait, the developers and loggers push their way into koala habitat, into Coutts Crossing; into Moonbiana Drive at Waterview; through massive areas of old growth tallowwood and grey gum habitat in State forests, removing preferred food trees and fragmenting core movement corridors virtually at will.

There have been more positive things coming out of Iluka, however, with John Turbill and Daniel Lunney now seeking to return for a re-assessment of their previous determination of koala extinction from that area. Continual WIRES records have shown this not to be the case, with females with back young picked up off roads and older animals relocated from a few unsuitable places. Then, with a tourist park extension imminent, the residents, who have been quietly planting food trees and guarding their koalas jealously, realised the value of having their sightings officially

recorded on the NSW Wildlife Atlas. So a good many more stars have been logged onto the GIS map by the Clarence Environment Centre.

More recently the Environment Centre has been asked by the Association of Iluka Residents (AIR) to represent them in opposing Chris Gulaptis' motion to return the current 80kph speed limit on the Iluka Road to its original 100kph. This, we feel, has to be easy. A petition touted by Mr Gulaptis as being a call by residents for the increase return, turns out to be one gathered at the time of the road's speed decrease. Ignored at the time, and its current whereabouts hazy, Mr Gulaptis seems not to have actually seen it, so it can only be deemed obsolete and irrelevant in this case. Letters have been sent off to various ministers and councillors on AIR's behalf, and let's hope common sense at last prevails. It seems pretty clear that Mr Gulaptis' imagination does not stretch so far as visualising himself hitting a young female koala with a joey on her back, and having to watch the joey fly off and be killed on impact on the tar. I can assure him from other people's experience that the resulting horror, trauma and guilt does not go away..



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